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SUBJECT: PHILANTHROPY IN IRELAND: A NEW MISSION INITIATIVE

¶1. Summary. On November 28, The Ambassador met with Pat Carey, Minister of State for Drugs Strategy and Community Affairs at the Department of Community, Rural, and Gaeltacht Affairs. The discussion centered on the Ambassador's intention to hold a symposium on February 21 to support the Irish government's efforts to advance philanthropic giving in Ireland. The Ambassador explained that he intends to invite U.S. and Irish participants from the "supply side" (wealthy individuals, heads of foundations, and wealth advisors) of the institutional philanthropy industry to a day-long event at his residence. Carey, one of the key government figures responsible for promoting philanthropy, said he fully supported the Ambassador's effort and offered to stay in close touch with the Embassy in the run-up to the symposium and beyond. The Irish government plans to introduce legislation in early 2008 to better define the regulatory structure of the philanthropic market. Carey assured the Ambassador that Ireland would "take a light touch" on any regulation. End Summary.

The Ambassador's Symposium

¶2. The Ambassador informed Carey of his plans to hold a symposium on February 21 at the Ambassador's residence. The Ambassador laid out the broad parameters of the symposium. From Ireland, he will invite wealthy individuals, Irish government officials, media representatives, and wealth advisors from accountancies, banks, and law firms. In addition, heads of U.S.-based philanthropic foundations will be encouraged to participate in order to talk about best practices in the U.S. The day-long event will be capped by a dinner at Irish President Mary McAleese's residence.

¶3. Carey said he was already aware of the initiative and thanked the Ambassador for sparking a debate in Ireland on the role of philanthropy. Carey said that he personally would do all that he could to support the Ambassador's effort. The Ambassador replied that he did not want to "steal anyone's thunder" but wanted to work in coordination with the Irish government and support its efforts on the issue.

The Regulatory Framework

¶4. Carey said that the Irish government is putting together legislation aimed at setting up a regulatory structure for philanthropy. He said that his department is responsible for drafting the legislation and shepherding it through the Irish Parliament. However, Carey will work closely with the Prime Minister's and Finance Minister's offices on the legislation. Carey explained that the legislation will be completed next year but that he does not expect the "full package to be in place before 2009."

¶5. The Ambassador pointed out that charitable giving was

lightly regulated in the U.S. Carey said that the Irish government will take a "very light touch" to regulating the sector and will focus on questions of compliance with the tax code and proper registration and monitoring of charities. Carey noted that charitable giving in Ireland is clearly in its infancy and the legal framework does not allow even for simple things like direct debit from bank accounts directly to charities.

Government/Philanthropy Interaction

16. Carey said that the government is engaging with the philanthropic community through the Philanthropy Forum. Carey's ministry chairs the quarterly meetings and includes organizations such as Philanthropy Ireland and the Community Foundation. On December 5, Econoff spoke with Carey's aide, Fergus Phelan, to get a readout from the November 30 meeting of the group. Phelan said the most important outcome of the meeting was that Philanthropy Ireland would conduct a baseline study of philanthropy in Ireland in order to get a clearer picture of who is giving and how much they are giving. Phelan admitted that the government does not have a handle on basic data such as this and pointed out that in order to craft effective legislation they would need concrete statistics.

Comment

17. The Ambassador has sparked a well-received debate in Ireland about what philanthropy is and what it can and should do. Traditionally, the Irish have looked to the government and the Catholic Church as the key actors on charitable issues, rarely -- if ever -- thinking about how the private-sector can contribute. On a wide-range of humanitarian issues, the Irish are inclined to take similar positions as our own. Therefore, expanding the universe of players in the Irish philanthropic sector and changing the mindset that only the government and the Church should play a role, will have a multiplier effect on Ireland's ability to address global humanitarian challenges.

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